

Paper's Sale Stills Editor's Liberal Voice in

Conservative York

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YORK, Pa., Oct. 23—Fifty-five years of colorful, outspoken, personal journalism have ended in this historic Colonial city.

Josiah W. (Jess) Gitt, editor of The Gazette and Daily since he bought it in 1915, sold the morning newspaper yesterday to Harold W. Fitzkee Jr., District Attorney of York County, and two associates in the law firm of Morris, Vedder & Fitzkee.

Although Mr. Gitt is 86 years old, a time of life when some publishers consider retirement, the sale was precipitated not by age but by declining revenue and a strike of the International Typographical Union, the first strike in the paper's history.

Paper Is Re-Named

Publication was suspended Oct. 8. Mr. Fitzkee settled with the union and publication resumed today under a new name, The York Daily Record.

The name was chosen to suggest continuity. Within three years of his purchase of The York Gazette in 1915, Mr. Gitt had acquired and incorporated into it The York Daily and The York Legal Record with The Gazette.

But the longtime publisher insisted this week that the name "Gazette" be retired with him.

"It is like retiring the number of a star baseball player," his son, Charles M. (Josh) Gitt, president of The Gazette and Daily, said in an interview.

Under his father, The Gazette and Daily was one of a kind. The tabloid, often an award winner for typography and appearance, regularly shocked

conservative York and York County with its views.

But readers bought it because it was the only morning paper in the city, and even many of its detractors believed that its sports and county news coverage were superior to that of the conservative afternoon Dispatch, the rival daily. In addition, a minority liked The Gazette's anti-establishment tone and aggressive reporting of dissenting as well as majority viewpoints on controversial issues.

The elder Mr. Gitt contributed to The Gazette's "Food for Thought" column and occasionally wrote signed editorials. His chief lieutenant for the last two decades in setting the paper's course was James Higgins, assistant editor until he turned to freelance writing this year.

Mr. Higgins, educated at Berkeley and Harvard, was one of a large number of writers attracted to York over the years by the prospect of working (at relatively low pay) for an editor who crusaded unequivocally against war, racism and infringement of human liberties.

Mr. Gitt supported Henry A. Wallace for President in 1948 for his peace stand. He refused to accept advertising for Senator Barry Goldwater's Presidential campaign in 1964.

Besides its own views, the Gazette presented such other opinions as those of Julio Alvarez del Vayo, a socialist who was Republican Spain's last Foreign Minister before Franco; I.F. Stone, Owen Lattimore and Drew Pearson. It reprinted articles from The Nation, The New Republic and other liberal publications.

"For years York has had two newspapers, one red and one

yellow," a resident said this week.

While Mr. Gitt never hesitated to give the dissenting voice a hearing, he strongly opposed dictatorship in any form.

Asked whether Mr. Gitt was a Communist, a priest who knew him well replied, "No, he is just a contrary, bull-headed Pennsylvania Dutchman like I am."

Most of York County was settled by Germans of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches, who, like the Amish and Mennonites to the north and east, are often called Pennsylvania Dutch. Dutch Gap and Saurkraut Hill have lost their separate identities as neighborhoods within the city, but the city, only 18 miles north of the Mason-Dixon Line, and the county remain conservative enough to harbor members of the Minutemen, John Birch Society and Ku Klux Klan.

The city, whose 50,000 population is 10 per cent black, has had a succession of racial incidents in recent years, including fighting that was suppressed by using police dogs. There was gunfire in the city's racially mixed high school last week after suspensions had been meted out to some pupils.

The Gazette lost subscribers the year of the Goldwater candidacy, and The Dispatch soon passed it in circulation. Another big drop in Gazette circulation followed the racial rioting in 1968. Then, Gazette reporters sought out black youths on the causes, and the result was that the newspaper's stories varied considerably from police versions printed by The Dispatch.

When the sale was announced this week, The Dispatch had a circulation of 45,000 and The Gazette 33,000. A sharp decline

in Gazette advertising had followed the reduction in circulation. Mr. Gitt asked all employees to take a "temporary" 10 per cent pay cut. The typographical union refused. The members of the American Newspaper Guild refused to cross its picket lines.

Unconventional dress was a factor in shaping attitudes of conventional York residents toward The Gazette. With Mr.

Gitt and other editors setting the fashion, Gazette reporters usually went about their work without neckties. One recently was ordered from a courtroom by the judge. Public officials have looked askance at long-haired Gazette men and women in jeans, sandals and love beads. The Gazette City Hall reporter covered his beat wearing tie-dyed shirts and earrings.